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## Taking Mental Health to the Front Line

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An exciting initiative is under way throughout the Marine Corps which recognizes that some of the most important "therapy" for psychological health problems is provided by battlefield buddies.

With OSCAR — Operational Stress Control and Readiness — it's a support team of a fellow Marine, a chaplain, a Navy physician or a mental health provider who has trained, fought and returned home with a unit. These men have shared significant events and have built tight bonds.

In its most simple form, OSCAR is an earlydetection program. The first team member is a small-unit leader, known as a mentor, who has been trained to recognize stress in a fellow Marine. It's this Marine's job to provide peer support.

Mentors are strong role models who have a sincere desire to help others. Many stress-related issues

are resolved at this level, just by talking things over and learning ways to look at a problem in a different, more positive manner.

If more help is needed, the mentor can refer a Marine to what's known as an OSCAR extender, who might be a Navy medical officer, corpsman or a chaplain. Extenders bridge the gap between mentors and the next level of the OSCAR team, the provider.

OSCAR providers are Navy mental health professionals who have spent a significant portion of their time embedded with their units both in garrison and in field training evolutions. With this background, the providers are more than just "medical assets." They are known to unit personnel through day-to-day contact and they have an understanding of mission requirements throughout the deployment cycle. They have built up a level of trust.

I personally have seen the power of such a program during two deployments to Iraq with Marine units that fought in Ramadi and Fallujah: 95 percent of those whom I assisted returned to duty – an impressive statistic by any standard.

The Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control (NCCOSC) is supporting

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OSCAR by helping to develop a program training curriculum for providers. It is an exciting undertaking because OSCAR is helping many Marines with stress problems before they become stress crises. And as important, the program is another example of the storied Marine Corps tradition of taking care of its own.

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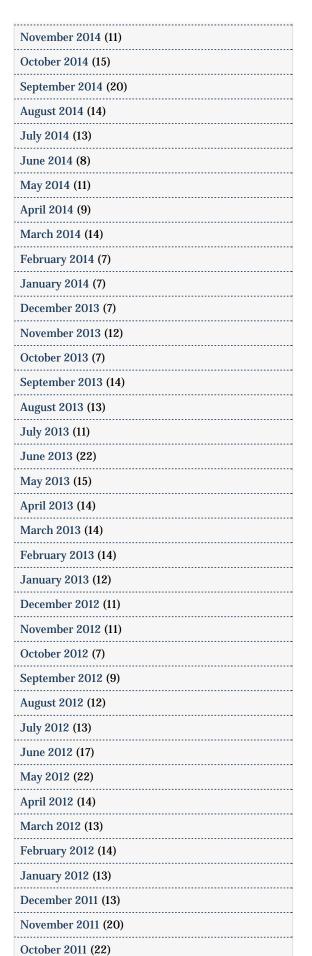
Dion Matriscino, LCSW

As a former Navy Hospital Corpsman who served on the USS Moosbrugger DD980 and in the Reserves (FMF) with the 4th Field Service Support Group and for nearly twenty years as a civilian clinical social worker, I believe you and OSCAR have and will save lives.

NCCOSC should develop that program training curriculum.

singapore photographer

Thanks for that awesome posting. It saved MUCH time <sup>(1)</sup>



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